ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF TURKEY

BULLETIN No. 9

July 1973

Bulletin Editor

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EDITORIAL

This bulletin perhaps emphasizes some of the important ornithological work being carried out in Turkey at the present time. Fred Koning and Lieuwe Dijksen completed their fifth successive winter wildfowl counts in January, and present an account of the wild geese situation in this issue. Richard Porter and Stanley Cramp have started the European Atlas survey off well with an atlas hunting expedition in Thrace and the Marmara area. And we have news of the results of the first year's results of the World Wildlife Fund's conservation project with the Bald Ibis (Geronticus eremita) at Birecik. Articles for future Bulletins are always welcome.

We hope that these reports will encourage everyone to take part in such projects and we will be particularly glad to supply information to anybody who would like to be involved with the atlas survey (see article) organised by the European Ornithological Atlas Committee.

The 1970/71 Report will be sent to the printers shortly and arrangements for the 1972/73 report are going ahead. We would appreciate an early receipt of records of 1972 and 73 so that we can work off the long delay in publication that presently exists (see note on submission of records).

WINTER DISTRIBUTION OF WILD GEESE IN TURKEY

by Fred Koning

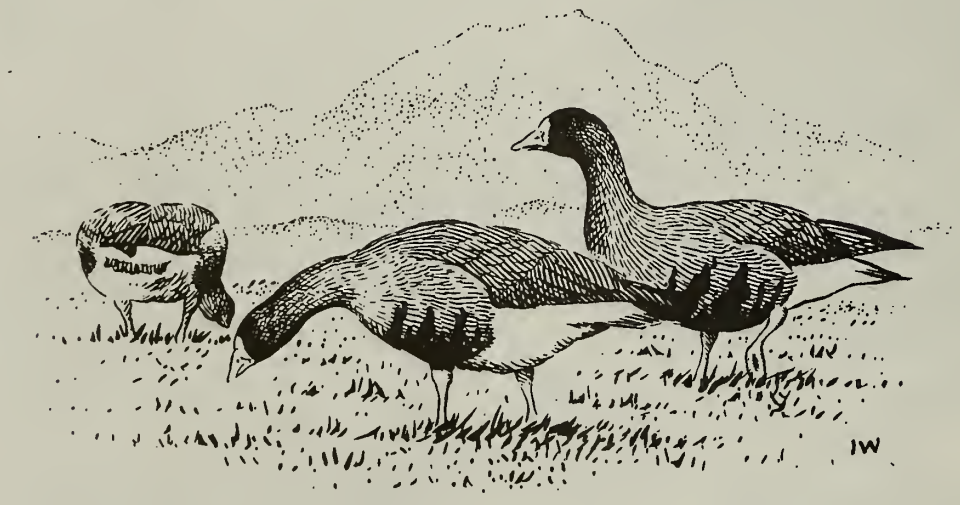
The check list of the Birds of Turkey includes seven species of geese which gives the impression that the country is a paradise for these birds. However only two species can be regarded as common. They are the Greylag Goose and White-fronted Goose.

The Lesser White-fronted Goose (Anser erythropus) and the Red breasted Goose (Branta ruficollis) are rare winter visitors. Bean Goose, Barnacle Goose and Brent Goose are vagrants.

1. White fronted goose (Anser albifrons).

This species breeds in northern Siberia where in winter survival is impossible. Therefore, the geese leave their breeding grounds in a westerly and south westerly direction. At the end of a long journey they arrive at their winter quarters which are mainly situated in western Europe (around the North Sea), eastern Europe (Roumania, Hungary), Anatolia and Iran.

For the International Waterfowl Research Bureau regular surveys have been made in Turkey and we now know something more about the size of the Anatolian population.



Their numbers fluctuate considerably : between 30,000 and 100,000. Table I gives the results from the surveys during the last four years. As it is difficult to survey Turkey completely within a very short time we can conclude that the Anatolian population varies between 50,000 and 100,000 birds.

Table I. Numbers of geese during the surveys.

Year	November	January	%juveniles
1970	98,000	56,000	-
1971	52,000	88,000	-
1972	No Survey	31,000	9 %
1973	?	62,000	39 %

It is not exactly known via which valleys or coasts the geese arrive in Turkey in October. Sometimes geese are seen in the valleys of eastern Turkey. However, never in big numbers or for long periods.

Their favourable winter grounds are situated on the Central Plateau of Turkey on an altitude between 800 and 1,000 meters. Here the original steppes have been transformed into extensive wheatfields which is an ideal feeding ground for geese. They consume the young sprouts of the winter wheat and sometimes also the corn dropped during the harvest.

Anser albifrons

Distribution in November 1972

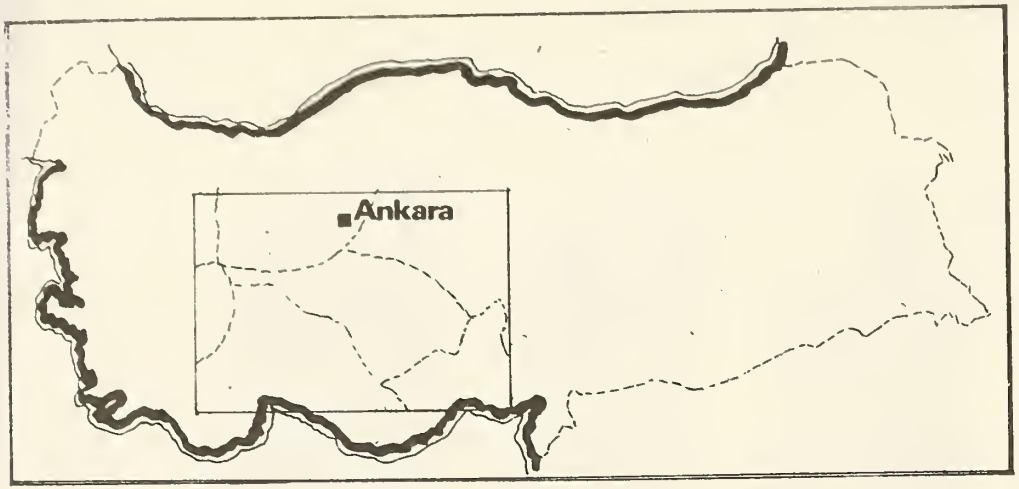
Total 64,000

KEY

- 10,000 – 20,000
- 5,000 – 10,000
- 1,500 – 5,000
- 500 – 1,500
- 10 – 500

Anser albifrons

Distribution in January 1973



Ankara

Kirsehir

Kayseri

Konya

Burdur

Eregli

Tarsus

White-fronts always need open surfaces of water to rest and sleep in order to be safe from wolves and foxes at night. Therefore the geese undertake daily flights between their feeding and roosting grounds. These daily movements make it possible for ornithologists to collect quite exact quantitative data of the populations - though it will cost him a good night's rest. One has to be present at the lake at least one hour before sunrise to see the birds departing for their feeding grounds which can be situated up to 15 miles from the roost.

Their noisy departure is a magnificent spectacle which even in -20°C is an unforgettable experience especially when cranes and ruddy shellducks are also involved. It can happen that one observes 30,000 geese in one hour only! They spread out in many directions over large distances and when one tries to find them by day one will come to the conclusion that there is only a very small population. Camping at the borders of the lakes therefore is the most reliable method of counting.

In mild winters and in autumn the geese are distributed all over the Central Plateau. Especially around Tuz-gölü and Seyfe-gölü. When the winter is severe and snow is deep the geese concentrate in the extreme southern and western parts of the Plateau. The lakes Aksehir and Hotamis then become of extreme importance. (see maps I and II). Here on the hills there are always snow free areas where food can be found. Infrequently the geese leave the Plateau for the Ceyhan Delta or Menderes Delta.

In western Turkey, White-fronted Geese can be seen, particularly on the Meric Delta and around lake Manyas but their numbers fluctuate considerably. These birds originate from the population that usually winters in the Dobrogea in Rumania and when the weather there becomes severe the geese migrate south and invade Bulgaria and western Turkey. Sometimes they are accompanied by some Branta ruficollis!

Grey Lag Goose (Anser anser).

The grey lag prefers lakes with a very rich aquatic vegetation of Phragmites, and Typha though sometimes they feed like Anser albifrons in the wheat fields. Their preferred habitat is rather scarce in Turkey, but where present grey lags can usually be found. The winter population is between 7,000 and 10,000 and there are only two areas which provide enough food to hold concentrations of importance. They are on the deltas of the river Meric in Thrace and Kizilirmak (Black Sea Coast). Unfortunately both these areas are in danger because of drainage projects which will destroy this vital habitat.

The following extract of a letter from Leiuwe Dijksen explains the attraction of winter in Turkey in 1972/73.

This winter was an interesting one for it started already early in December. On the 14th of that month Mogan Gölü was completely covered with solid ice. During January it was freezing almost everywhere. Even in the deltas near Adana and Silifke night frosts occurred. Probably due to this some species were much rarer than in other winters, e.g. Buteo rufinus, Aquila heliaca. Also we didn't see Anthus cervinus. This can also be caused by the strong cold winds that occurred in the southern deltas.

Icy winds in the surroundings of Beysehir and Burdur also reduced our observations on passerines. (Beysehir G. was almost entirely covered with ice!). However we could do Burdur Gölü under extremely good weather conditions. Compared with the other lakes it held large numbers : 9,000 Oxyura, 120,500 coots, 52,000 Aythya ferina, 11,200 A.fuligula, 2,600 Netta, 11,900 Pod nigricollis, 27 Melanitta fusca etc. The Kizilirmak delta was very good too. A total of 96,000 ducks, geese and coots, of which 4,690 were Anser anser. The Menderes delta and that near Adana and Silifke had very small numbers this winter (reasons?) (our total number of teal was only 36,200!). We found ± 65,000 Anser albifrons, almost all concentrated at Aksehir and Hotamis Gölü. Both lakes had only a few holes in the ice. The surroundings of Tuz Gölü were covered with snow and only a few geese were present. At Hotamis we also observed one Branta ruficollis and 9 Cygnus cygnus. According to hunters also a few Anser erythropus and Anser fabalis were shot there. Other interesting observations are : a Anthus campestris and one Motacilla flava at Balik G. and a Red Kite near Edirne.

Submission of Records

We are now collecting records for the 1972/73 report and these should be sent to the Editors, Ornithological Society of Turkey, c/o RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds, England.

Records should be listed under species (not please under localities) and using only one side of a sheet. Species should be listed in the order used in the "Check List of the Birds of Turkey" (i.e. that used by C. Vaurie in the "Birds of the Palearctic Fauna").

Example layout:

Sterna hirundo (J.D.R.V. - observers initials).

W. Anatolia 18th July, 1972. Colony of 20 pairs. APOLYONT GOLU. (Region *)

* A map showing the boundaries of the geographical regions of Turkey can be found in the "Check List".

Early submission of records would be appreciated in order to speed up the publication of the 1972/73 report.

A few copies of the 1968/69 Report are still available, price £1.60. (post free), also a few copies of the "Check List of the Birds of Turkey", price 55p. (post free) from OST, c/o RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds, England.

The Bald Ibis at Birecek

1973 has seen the instigation of a programme to protect the Bald Ibises (Geronticus eremita) at their breeding site at Birecek under the auspices of the World Wildlife Fund. Udo Hirsch has been appointed by the W.W.F as the warden at Birecek and has set about consulting the local population on use of pesticides and the disposal of rubbish which has caused so much harm to the colony.

The twenty-three pairs which nested this year produced atotal of 80 eggs from which 21 young flew. The main reason for the low success rate is still the disturbance caused by rubbish and falling stones.

Of particular importance is the fact that several pairs nested on wooden platforms built specially for this purpose. This recalls the use of wooden platforms at Lake Manyas with such success for the breeding of Dalmation Pelicans (Pelecanus crispus). The Turkish authorities and the W.W.F. are to be congratulated on this achievement.

Even so, the number of pairs nesting this year has decreased from the 1972 figure, so that it is essential that the project continue in successive years with the goodwill of the Turkish people.

NEWS ITEM ON BEHALF OF THE EOAC.

A BREEDING BIRD ATLAS FOR TURKEY.

by Richard Porter.

The recently formed European Ornithological Atlas Committee (EOAC) who will be co-ordinating the mapping of the distribution of the breeding birds of Europe hopes to extend its activities to Turkey. The idea of the scheme is to build up species maps of Europe and Turkey showing the distribution of breeding birds, probably on a 10 kilometer square basis. Several countries have already started surveys and with the current wave of interest running fast, others are quickly joining.

Turkey has about 270 breeding species but even after a considerable amount of study in recent years it is not possible to draw up anything more than "guess work" breeding distribution maps for the majority of species.

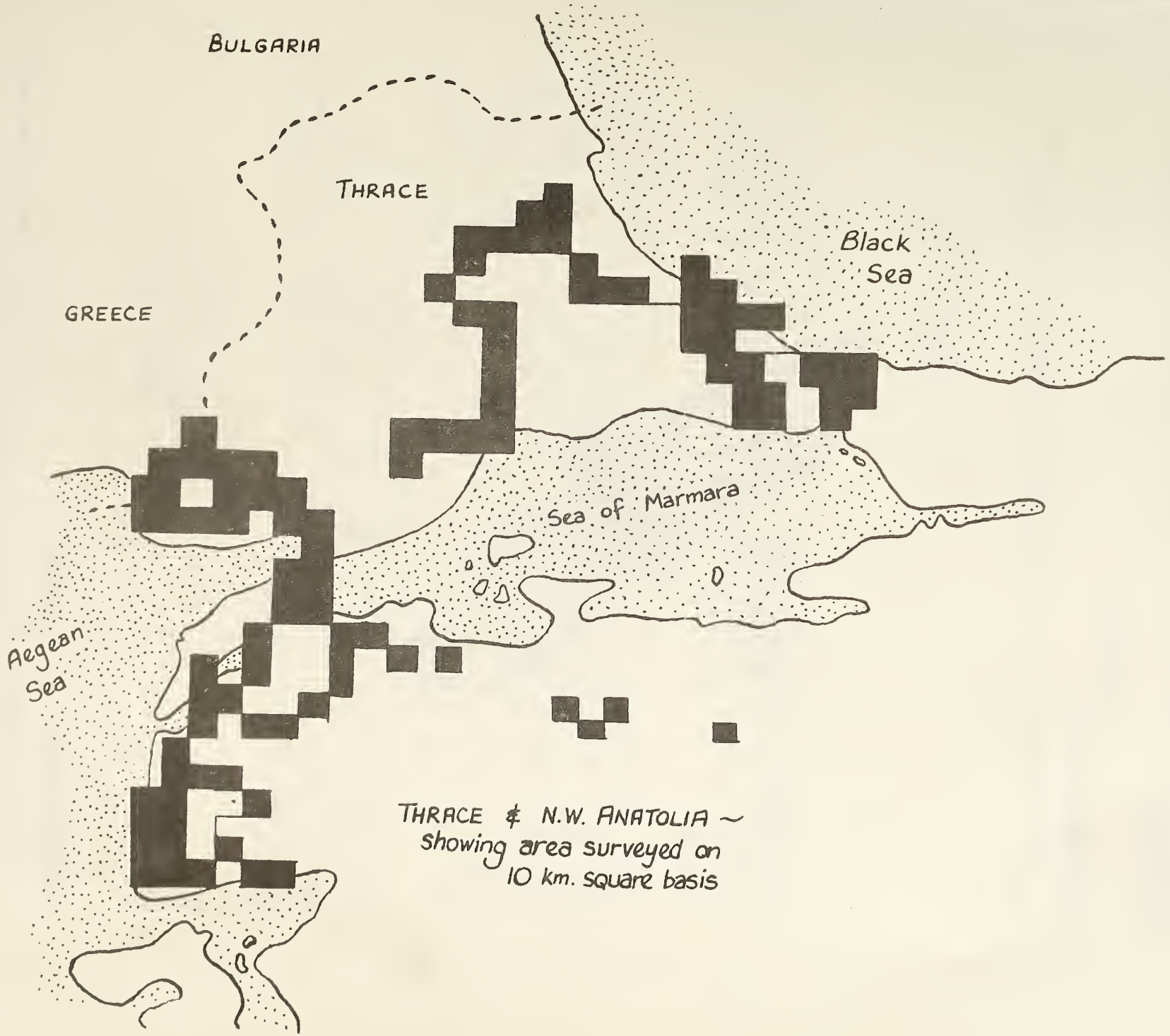
Many birdwatchers stick to the well worn tracks of the Bosphorus, Marmara Lakes, Tuz Golu, the southern estuaries of the Menderes, Goksu and Ceyhan. And then in spring or autumn, not summer. Much is known about the birds of the Taurus Mountains at the points transected by the main north to south roads. Uludag, the ancient Mount Olympus, in western Turkey is a regular ornithological stopping-off spot but this is only one mountain in a whole chain. Who has visited the Marmara Islands in summer - could there be shearwater colonies there? The exciting woods and mountains of the Black-sea coast and Russian Border have only been the subject of one breeding season trip to my knowledge in recent years, yet that found Caucasian Blackcock, Snow Cock, nesting Lammergeiers, Velvet Scoters on mountains lakes,and Black Woodpeckers. But no Green Warblers - and yet they are supposed to breed in the woods of the Pontic mountains - but who has found them in recent years. Where do the rare Marbled Teal and White-headed Duck nest - there have only been a handful of summer records. Are Black-headed Buntings, Corn Buntings, Olivaceous Warblers and Turtle Doves widespread. At what altitude will White Storks nest? How low do Snowfinches come? What are the complicated range patterns of the scrub warblers - Sardinian, Ruppell's, Sub-Alphine and Menetries? How far west can breeding White-throated Robins, Bimaculated Larks and Crimson-winged finches be found? What recent proof is there of nesting Griffon and Black Vultures? Is there a second colony of Bald Ibises? These and many other questions could be answered by birdwatchers visiting Turkey in the breeding season and leaving the beaten track to tackle areas that are at present ornithologically unknown.

With only two weeks at our disposal, Stanley Cramp, Chief Editor of Birds of the Western Palearctic, and I decided to look at an area which surprisingly has been little studied - that of Thrace. Normally a transit country for bird-watchers bound for the more spectacular birds of the east. Few stop to see what is to be found beyond the roadside agricultural plains. (Really only the Meric/Evros Delta has received attention - so ably by Bauer and Muller in recent years). In the course of fourteen days we visited 99 ten kilometer squares in Thrace and a small coastal area of Anatolia south of the Dardenelles. It would be true to say though that only 32 squares were covered in any depth - the rest were flashed through in the car with the occasional stop at an interesting patch of habitat.

We were able to obtain proof of 75 species breeding and a further 60 were found in suitable breeding habitat and doing the sort of things you would expect breeding birds to do - singing, displaying, scolding at intruders and so could be classed as probably breeding. Amongst the most widely distributed species were Crested Lark, Black-headed Bunting, Turtle Doves, Corn Bunting, Jackdaws, Hooded Crows, Magpies, Wheatears, Nightingales, Bee-eaters and White Storks with Housesparrows and Swallows present in the most 10 km. squares.

There were some surprises to, for example although Corn Bunting was one of the commonest and most widespread species we didn't prove it breeding. No gamebirds or Stone Curlews were seen - birds that on previous visits to Turkey in summer I have found fairly common. Not to even hear a quail was very surprising. Black Kites were far rarer than I had hoped and Lesser-kestrels present in only a few villages. One had the impression that the distribution of White Storks may be slowly changing with the advent of villages with tiled, rather than straw roofs.

Among the rarer or less widespread birds present in suitable breeding habitat were Black Stork (4 squares), Honey Buzzard (3), Black Kite (2), Booted Eagle (2), Lesser-spotted Eagle (3), Short-toed Eagle (6), Kentish Plover (2), Black-winged Stilt (2), Pratincole (4), Kingfisher (2), Orphean Warbler (3), Isabeline Wheatear (3), Blue Rock Thrush (1), Redstart (1), Marsh Tit (2), Sand Martin (1), Masked Shrike (4), Olive-tree Warbler (3), Penduline Tit (5), Kruper's Nuthatch (1) and Yellowhammer (1) - the latter representing one of the first indications of the breeding of the species in Turkey. Amongst the highlights were four Eleonoras Falcons displaying over an ideal nesting cliff near to the sea but unfortunately we were too early to prove breeding.



THRACE & N.W. ANATOLIA ~
Showing area surveyed on
10 km. square basis

Any birdwatchers who would like to help in the preparation of the Atlas by making trips to lesser known regions in the breeding season should contact the joint secretary of the European Ornithological Atlas Committee, Dr. J.T.R. Sharrock, 59, Curlew Crescent, Brickhill, Bedford, England.

Why not consider getting off the beaten track to discover new colonies of Dead Sea Sparrows a species that has recently been proved to breed on the Mediterranean Coast of Turkey. Or even to search the southern rivers to find if the Brown Fish Owl still breeds as they apparently did at the turn of the century.

INFORMATION REQUIRED

The following letter was received from Professor P. R. Grant of McGill University. We would be pleased to pass on any information available.

McGill University,
P.O. Box 6070,
Montreal 101, QUE.,
Canada.

Dear Sir,

I am doing a morphological and ecological study of the Rock Nuthatches Sitta neumayer and Sitta tephronota. I had hoped to visit Turkey this summer because in some ways our knowledge of S. neumayer in Turkey is poorer than elsewhere but unfortunately I ran out of time and could get no further than Istanbul. At the suggestion of Lindon Cornwallis I am writing to ask you for help.

If either you or any acquaintances visit Turkey this year or next I would be most grateful if you could get me some of the following information. I should like tape-recordings of the several calls. I should like as many measurements as possible of the dimensions of the nest entrances, since these faithfully reflect body size and I have no information on the body size (weight) of Turkish birds. I measure the internal diameter of the width and depth (height) of the nest entrance tube, just inside the lip of the opening. I would appreciate receiving fragments of seeds or other food items which the bird has taken. In parts of Greece and Yugoslavia they took the largest seeds, went to large rocks and hammered at them on top of the rock, so I was later able to go up to the rocks, pick up the fragments and measure their size.

I thought Ephesus might be a good place to collect this sort of information since specimens have been collected there, but you will know better than I where the birds occur in areas suitable for study. In fact any information you can supply on distribution, feeding, behaviour, breeding etc. will be gratefully received. In addition I would be glad of any records of S. neumayer and S.europae coming into geographical contact, acting aggressively or foraging in the same place.

Yours sincerely,

P. R. Grant,
Associate Professor,
Dept. of Biology.

MENETRIES WARBLER (Sylvia mystacea)

I am intending to write a short article on the distribution of S.mystacea for the next bulletin. I would be very grateful for any information on this

species, particularly site records with notes on plumage characteristics, habitat and probable status. Any records of Sylvia melanocephala would also be welcome.

May I take this opportunity of thanking those of you who sent in letters in answer to my queries on Red-tailed Wheatears (Oenanthe xanthoprymna) in the last issue of the bulletin. Any further records, comments or sightings this year would be very welcome.

Mike Harrison